

FELLOWSHIP BRIEF

Bridging Legal Frameworks and Grassroots Advocacy in Bozeman, Montana

Bella Amell - B.A. '27 in Global Affairs and Environmental Studies

The Need.

Environmental law has deep roots in the American West, a region shaped by legal battles over land, water, natural resources, and a particular vulnerability to the impacts of climate change. From early conservation efforts that led to the establishment of the national parks system to landmark lawsuits protecting public lands and the endangered species that reside there, the West has been a battleground for environmental advocacy for decades. However, this work is easier said than done. Challenging large corporations requires intensive time, resources, volunteer effort, and community buy-in. One of the largest challenges facing environmental law centers is not necessarily legal complexity, but community integration.



Photo Credit: Bella Amell

The Project.

Bella worked with Cottonwood Environmental Law Center on a number of ongoing cases and advocacy projects. Bella focused on supporting Cottonwood's efforts to prosecute the Yellowstone

Club for the alleged dumping of treated sewage into the Gallatin River through conducting research, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, and creating content for Cottonwood's website and social media channels. Bella also worked with the Water Adequacy for Residential Development (WARD) Working Group to collect signatures for a ballot initiative to increase affordable housing stock in Bozeman, Montana.

The Findings.

Bella worked on a number of projects for Cottonwood to translate complex legal language and scientific data into content to share with the Bozeman community. Bella covered issues including Clean Water Act violations, an upcoming Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) case, and helped to organize Cottonwood's annual fundraising gala. Bella created a report summarizing the key dates, actors, and events of Cottonwood's current and past lawsuits since 2010, a guest column for the Bozeman Daily Chronicle in support of the WARD ballot initiative, and an annual report summarizing donation sources, grants, and costs for 2024.

The Impact.

Bella's efforts will support the mission of Cottonwood to protect the people, forests, water, and wildlife of the American West through conservation lawsuits and educational campaigns. The reports that Bella created will be used by Cottonwood staff and the Bozeman community to build institutional memory and increase community participation in environmental and legal issues. Her contributions to Cottonwood's social media channels and weekly newsletters will additionally increase community interest in ongoing lawsuits.



The Student.

Bella Amell - Western Resource Fellow | Bella is a student in Yale College studying Global Affairs and Environmental Studies, with a concentration in environmental law and policy. She was born and raised in the beautiful Brunswick, Maryland, and is passionate about advocating for environmental justice and ecosystem conservation in rural communities. Elsewhere on campus, you can find her singing with her a cappella group, the New Blue of Yale, crafting the perfect cup of coffee at the Silliman Acorn, or representing her residential college community as a Senator on the Yale College Council.